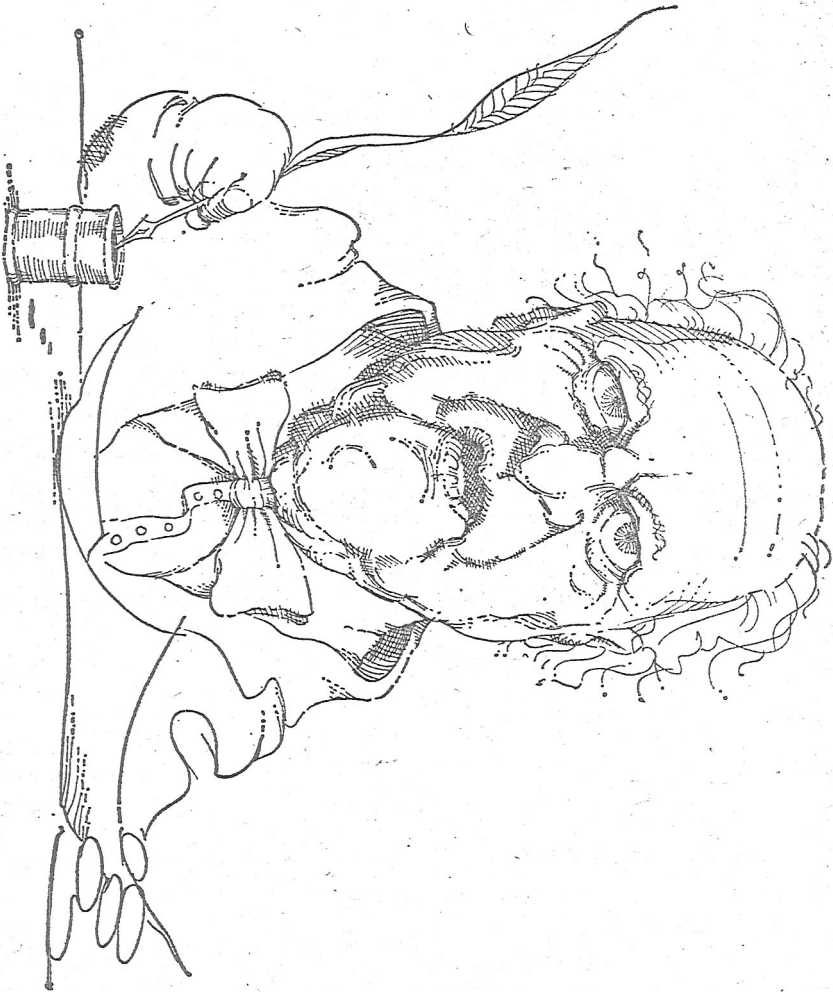


H. L. Hunt: Adviser to Presidents

By Booth Mooney

Mooney, a writer of history and biography,
was Washington representative of the
Hunt Oil Co. for a dozen years.



By John T. Wotley—The Washington Post

PRESIDENT WILSON had his Col. E. M. House, Mr. Roosevelt had Bernard Baruch and Mr. Truman was advised on many matters by Washington lawyer Clark Clifford. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon had the late H. L. Hunt of Dallas, although it is not of record that any of them solicited the counsel so freely offered by the fabulously rich oil producer.

Hunt's unrelenting effort to ward off a takeover of the United States by "The Mistaken," as he collectively dubbed all persons who deviated ever so slightly from his own woolly rightwing ideology, necessitated his keeping a wary eye on occupants of the White House. More often than not—in fact, nearly always—he was deeply disturbed by what he saw.

Although it was not until after World War II that he could spare time to give presidential deficiencies the attention he felt they deserved, he had been watching and assessing Presidents since the early 1930s. Hunt regarded Herbert Hoover as incapable and perceived that his administration had "socialistic tendencies." Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the Texan's view, earned the unenviable distinction of being the first U.S. President to set class against class. Harry Truman, although somewhat of an improvement over FDR, "knew little and did little and consequently did not do much harm" with the glaring exception of firing Gen. Douglas MacArthur from his Far East command.

MacArthur was one of Hunt's few heroes. "The free world would have been saved," he said, if MacArthur had been elected President in 1952. He expected little in the way of world salvation from Mr. Eisenhower.

HUNT AND Mr. Eisenhower met for the first time in the summer of 1950 when the general was serving as president of Columbia (and hoped to get some money from the oil mogul), and the meeting had not gone at all well. Mr. Eisenhower took the stand in their conversation that persons accused of conniving with Communists should be considered innocent until proved guilty. Hunt would not accept this proposition and considered any man advancing it unfit to be President.

After Mr. Eisenhower took office, Hunt tried for a time to advise him on foreign and domestic policies, being able, he claimed, to get messages to the President through Homer Gruen-

ther, a White House aide. But he soon gave up in disgust because he found that Mr. Eisenhower was listening to "the same school of advisers that had advised Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman."

He gave the final flat verdict that Mr. Eisenhower was "no good" and "the most harmful President we've ever had." He was able to get away with anything, Hunt said, because he was "so popular he didn't have to do anything people asked him to do."

Hunt favored Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic nomination in 1960 and opposed John F. Kennedy on the double grounds of his Catholicism and his liberalism. In the end, however, still liking LBJ, he issued a statement shortly before election day that he would vote for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket.

After Mr. Kennedy's death he wrote, "My announced support . . . in the 1960 election may have been the deciding factor in Illinois and Missouri, where my relatives have been well-known Republicans for many years." And as late as 1971 he told a startled reporter for the Dallas Morning News, "If I'd supported Nixon, Kennedy would have lost."

In any case, he started finding things wrong with the young President even before he took office.

He addressed a series of letters to Mr. Kennedy pointing out that many mistakes were being made in announced appointments. Nearly all of them, Hunt thought, were "very poor choices." He wrote the President, "A well informed anti-Communist said recently that of the 72 top appointments, including the cabinet, he would not openly say any one of them was a Communist, but if he were placed on the stand regarding any one of them, he would not testify that he was not a Communist."

He also strongly warned Mr. Kennedy against seeking advice from his

predecessor, warning, "Inasmuch as Eisenhower argued with me in 1950, the first time I ever met him, about Alger Hiss after Hiss had been convicted and about Phillip Jessup, and now since we have lost hundreds of millions of people to communism during his eight presidential years, I do not believe he can help you or that you should depend on him."

Since nearly everything Mr. Kennedy did was exactly contrary to what his unsought adviser wished him to do, the Texan stopped sending him letters as of Sept. 30, 1961, "at the time that it appeared they served no purpose."

Despite Mr. Kennedy's recalcitrance, Hunt said disingenuously several years after the President's death, "I was for practically everything Kennedy did in public life. I think that his assassination was the greatest blow that ever befell the cause of freedom."

DISTURBED BY Lyndon Johnson's stand on civil rights and other domestic issues during his first year in office, Hunt supported Barry Goldwater for President in 1964, even though he faulted the Arizonian for what Hunt felt was his failure in "not drawing the line" between conservatism and liberalism. Once the election was over, he began a determined effort to guide LBJ along the right path. In January, 1965, he served notice that he planned to initiate a new series of memos in

the hope that he could offer suggestions which "will become helpful in the career of President Lyndon B. Johnson."

Hunt was sorely disappointed that the President did not institute an immediate wholesale housecleaning to eliminate the "accumulation of dubious personnel in the executive branch of the government." Loyalty trials, which tended to stir up trouble, were definitely not recommended by Hunt for government officials or employees suspected of subversion. Once the guilty were identified, trial and conviction in court should not be necessary to oust them from their positions.

"Determining guilt by association is a much more reliable means of serving the U.S. Government and the free world than for top officials to rely on provable Communist records," Hunt assured the President. "The cause of freedom has been sadly impaired by men acting in bad faith long before their loyalty is seriously questioned, if ever."

He also expressed the hope that Mr. Johnson would not make the mistake of listening too attentively to businessmen, especially those in the big northeastern cities of the United States. Businessmen could be as willfully mistaken as anyone else, he warned, and many of them were.

"Businessmen who feel that patriots are 'cranks' and dangerous to them have been subjected to a 'line' from

the advocates of socialism," Hunt wrote the President, "and have reached a complex that a business place must soothe the Socialist, caress the Communist and never possibly show any evidence of patriotism without displeasing their stockholders, disturbing their labor and losing a large per cent of their customers."

Advise as the old gentleman might, it was all of no use. Mr. Johnson never gave the slightest sign of paying any attention to the snowstorm of memoranda from Dallas, which for a time descended on the White House at the rate of four or five a week.

HE TRIED AGAIN with the next President, in whom for a time he reposed great confidence. Even before Richard Nixon was inaugurated, Hunt sent him a list of men, many of them ex-FBI agents, "who might accept positions with federal branches of the government." A little later, after Nixon was installed in office, Hunt urged him to make use of former military associates of Gen. MacArthur to "improve and safeguard" the Department of Defense.

He also had something else on his mind, and he told Mr. Nixon about it before the new President had been in office a month.

"If the Caucasians (sic) of the United States and Great Britain have developed an unsatisfied yen to be

ruled by non-Caucasians, the Communists of China will, no doubt, be willing to accommodate and rule them," Hunt wrote in an unaccustomed venture into sarcasm.

He proceeded to urge Mr. Nixon and his associates to give close attention to determining "the current policy the Administration should pursue at this time regarding Negroes." Returning to the theme a few weeks later, he stated in a few rather long sentences the principal elements of the "southern strategy" to which a presidential aide later would devote most of a book.

"For the past 35 years there has been nothing that the Democratic party has done which would please the people south of the Mason-Dixon line," Hunt wrote Mr. Nixon in his unusual sweeping fashion. "A large number of popular votes and electoral strength are involved in these states and these voters will go elsewhere than the Democratic Party, if there is any place to go. They will go to third party movements if the Republicans fail to provide an atmosphere in which these voters can feel free and more secure."

"It is a well-known fact that this southern area encompasses a segment of the population that is more truly

and typically American, with most of the citizenry untouched by the isms and alien philosophies that have found acceptance in other sections of the country . . . It would be a mistake of major proportions if the Republican Party which showed some strength with southern voters in the last election, should now force them into splinter party movements by embracing the policies and personnel of the very party these voters roundly rejected at the polls last year. Constructive action in the national administration will not

only retain these southern Republicans in the Republican Party but will capture a large part of the Democratic vote."

The strategy he advocated was followed, with embellishments and success, in 1972, but by then the President had fallen into complete disfavor with Hunt.

He conceded that Mr. Nixon had done some good things, such as encouraging his Vice President to attack the slanted news media and turning his Attorney General loose to fight crime and anarchy. But, as the man from Texas saw matters, the wisdom of many of the President's appointments and most of his policies was in grave question. He had not cleaned out the State Department. Welfare rolls and government spending were higher than ever. Worst of all, he had initiated efforts at rapprochement with Communist China and Soviet Russia.

Even before Watergate, Mr. Nixon had replaced Mr. Eisenhower, Hunt said sadly, as "the worst President we've ever had."

Illness culminating in his death on Nov. 29 prevented H. L. Hunt from becoming an adviser to President Gerald Ford.